

Notes on the Bhars and other Early Inhabitants of Bundelkhand.—By
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(With one plate.)

The origin, history and fate of the Bhar* tribe have long afforded material for speculation and enquiry to students of local antiquities and history in the eastern districts of the N. W. P. and Audh, but hitherto no attempt seems to have been made to trace the westward extension of the race, or to collect any information concerning it in the districts west of Alláhábád and Banda. The following notes are the result of observations and enquiries made in the Hamírpur District during the last two years, and, incomplete and fragmentary though they are, they will I hope be found to supplement usefully the information previously collected by observers in the eastern districts and to throw some light on the history of the Bhar tribe.

The Census returns of 1872 give the total number of Bhars in the N. W. P. as 243,462, and of Ráj Bhars as 13,481, the grand total being 256,943 : the district details† show that the tribe is now almost exclusively confined to those eastern districts which were formerly included in the Province of Benares and in the kingdom of Audh : the census figures may not perhaps be perfectly accurate, but they certainly indicate correctly in a general way the distribution of the tribe throughout the N. W. P.

It will be observed that not a single Bhar is recorded as residing in any of the Bundelkhand districts ; it is, however, well known that the Bhars were once numerous in Banda, and the information which I have collected proves that in former times they lived in every part of the Hamírpur District, and were even found in the Jhán sí District west of the Dhasán River : how much farther west they may have extended I have at present no means of judging, but it is evident that the tribal movement has been from the west eastwards, and it would therefore appear that the answer to the question ‘ who were the Bhars ? ’ should be sought, not, as has hitherto been done, in the localities where they have been driven to bay, but rather in those western regions from which they emigrated.

The former presence of the Bhars in the Hamírpur District is attested by the traditions, which will be presently described, and by local names in every pargana. A few examples of such names out of many may be of

* The name is usually spelt ‘ Bhar ’, but the spelling ‘ Bharr ’ would more accurately represent the pronunciation.

† Details are :—

RAJBHAR.—Jaunpur (256) : A’zamgarh (316) : Gházípur (5,631) : Gorakhpur (1,464) : Bastí (5,814). Total 13,481.

BHAR.—Meerut (22) : Badáon (14) : Agra (130) : Kánhpur (1248) : Alláhábád

interest; thus, the old name of the town of Sumerpur (in Parg. Sumerpur) is Bharuá, and in the parganas of Maudhá, Panwári-Jaitpur, Jalálpur, and Ráth, respectively, we find localities named Bharsawán, Bharwára, Barkharí or Barkharí, and Bhanraurá Kherá, and in several of these cases the evidence of the name is confirmed by that of tradition.

There seems to me to be little doubt that the Bhars are a non-Aryan race, and are the congeners of the Gonds, Kols, Bhíls, and other more or less wild and predatory hill tribes who once occupied Bundelkhand. It is, as Sir H. Elliot* observes, "confessedly very difficult to trace the connexion or difference between the aboriginal tribes of Bhars, Cherús, Seorís, and Kols", and Mr. Sherring† believes "that many of the aboriginal tribes of India were originally blended together." Whatever may be the precise connexion between the so-called aboriginal tribes, it is quite certain that several of them occupied Bundelkhand simultaneously and jointly, and I suspect that in traditions they are often confounded. For instance as in the case of M. Gund‡ (in Parg. Panwári-Jaitpur), where the name points apparently to the Gonds, the original settlers are spoken of as Chamárs: in such cases I suspect that the term Chamár is used in a vague way to cover the ignorance of the speaker, and is practically equivalent to "low caste barbarian"; the word Chamár it will be remembered is not properly the name of a tribe, but simply means a worker in leather. I think it very probable that the Chamárs, who now form the most numerous element in the low caste labouring population, are an extremely heterogenous body, and have but recently been developed into a caste formed of the fragments of tribes, which were free from the trammels of caste, and were alike unclean and impure in the eyes of the Brahmans, and whose remnants have now been lumped together by Brahman pride as the men who work in leather, the unclean thing.§

We have no direct knowledge of the inhabitants of Bundelkhand at the dawn of history; our earliest piece of information is that afforded by Hiouen Thsang in the 7th century A. D., who states that the king of Kha-

(76) : Jaunpur (14,695) : A'zamgarh (74,144) : Mírzápur (4,338) : Benares (34,805) : Gházípur (53,060) : Gorakhpur (43,152) : Bastí (17,322) : Garhwál (456).

Total 243,462.

[From N. W. P. Census Rep. I, pp. 105, 135.]

* Beames' Elliot, I, p. 60, s. v. Cherú.

† J. R. As. Soc. V., N. S., p. 399.

‡ Here, as in many other villages in the south, a Gond ghost is locally worshipped.

§ In connection with this subject, it may be noted that the *kustá* or waistcloth, worn by the low caste women of Bundelkhand, seems to be the same garment as that used by the women of the Maiwár Bhíls (J. A. S. B., XLV, Pt. I, pp. 355 and 289): and the same dress is used by the Gonds (Beames' Elliot, s. v. Gond).

juráho was a Brahman. About 800 A. D., the Chandel dynasty arose and ruled in Kálinjar, Khajuráho, and Mahobá, but the inscriptions which give us the names and lineage of the rulers tell us nothing of the ruled. Chand in his account of the Chauhán and Chandel war (in 1184 A. D.) gives us a glimpse of the subjects of the Chandels in his list of the warriors of the Chandel prince Parmál; the list names Isur Dás Lodhí Bhupál, two Gonds, a Baghel, a Gahlaut, and others, but in what I have read of Chand's poem I have not found any mention of the Bhars. Famous though the Chandel dynasty is for the great embankments and splendid temples constructed under its auspices, I believe that, even in its flourishing days, the country was but very partially cleared, and was chiefly inhabited by sundry hill tribes, who owned indeed a certain allegiance to the Rájá, but yet lived for the most part free of control, and indulged with little restraint in their hereditary propensities for fighting and plunder. According to the census returns of 1872, the Chandels in the Hamírpur District number only 656, and, although they were undoubtedly once much more numerous than now, I do not believe that they ever colonized the country in large force. In the Mahobá pargana the Chandels are zamíndárs, I think, in only two villages; in the rest of the district I do not know of their holding a single village, and the local* traditions of the many villages in every pargana which I have examined, in no case mention the Chandels as the former owners of the soil, but everywhere we find traces of Gonds, Kols, Bhíls, Bhars, Káchhís, Ahírs, Chamárs, and other low caste and outcast people as the original occupiers of the land.

I believe then that the Chandels were simply a small clan who supplied the members of the ruling dynasty and much of the *personnel* of the local court, but who never supplanted the tribes that were in occupation of the soil previous to the rise of the dynasty. But the Bhars and Gonds and their fellows have now disappeared, or have at least lost all tribal individuality, and can no longer be identified under the old names, and other races are lords of the soil. In other parts of India a similar transfer of the land seems to have occurred, but there the history of the change is obscure and the details unknown; here, however, the outlines of the revolution can be clearly traced, and even some of the details can still be vividly presented.

Whatever may be the truth with regard to eastern Audh, where Mr. Carnegy† with apparently considerable reason, doubts the reality of the fact of a Rájput conquest, there is no doubt that in the Hamírpur District the Bhars, Gonds and other early occupiers of the soil, were in compara-

* For some of this local information I am indebted to notes made by natives employed by Mr. W. Martin, C. S., and to his contributions to the N. W. P. Gazetteer.

† J. A. S. B., Vol. XLV, (1876), p. 297 seqq.

tively recent times vanquished by force of arms and obliged to yield their lands to the conquerors, who either exterminated the vanquished or reduced them to a servile condition : in a great portion of the district the victors were Rájputés, but in extensive tracts they were* Lodhís, themselves a tribe of probably non-Aryan descent. It is impossible to say exactly when this contest began and when it ended, but it was protracted and intermittent, and certainly lasted from 1080 A. D. to 1730 A. D., as I now proceed to show in some detail.

The Sárdúl Charitra, a metrical chronicle of the Bágri Thákurs, relates the manner in which 750 of that clan treacherously destroyed at Kahrá, in the west of the Banda district, 1000 Kols and Bhíls, and then seized their villages in the year 1137 Samvat = 1080 A. D. ; the story is curious and interesting, but is too long to quote : it is to be observed that at the date mentioned in the chronicle the power of the Chandel dynasty was at its height. Another similar tribal record tells of the conquest of the Bhíls in the same tract of country by the Mauháar Thákurs in the year 1239 Samvat = 1182 A. D.

The parganas of Hamírpur and Sumerpur are now almost exclusively held by Bais, Gaur, Gautam, and other Thákur clans, most of whom retain more or less distinct traditions of their having entered the country from the north-west, cleared the jungle and founded the existing villages : for example it is still remembered how in the year 1405 Samvat = 1348 A. D., Bija Rai Gaur came from Ajmír and entered the service of Hamír Deo Karchulí, the founder of the town of Hamírpur, and settled his followers and relatives in twelve villages in the neighbourhood : and many other similar traditions might be related, though a precise date is not generally given.

I have already mentioned that the local nomenclature of the northern parganas shows traces of the presence of the Bhars previous to the Rájput invasions.

It is plain then that in large tracts of country the wild tribes had been early overpowered, but in many places they held their ground much longer : thus the story is told that the Bhars of Islámpur† in the north of the Ráth pargana were punished by Islám Sháh for looting royal treasure, and it seems most probable that the prince referred to was Sher Sháh's son Islám Sháh, who reigned from 1545-53 A. D. and whose favourite capital was Gwáliár.

At Maudhá in the east of the Hamírpur District mention is made of

* I use the form Lodhí in preference to Lodha, because the former is that commonly used in Hamírpur.

† Here and in several neighbouring villages the Bhars are remembered as Bharé Thákurs : the desire of low caste tribes to pass as Rájputés is well known.

the Kols so late as the year 1730 A. D., when a battle took place between Dalíl Khán, a son of the Súbahdár of Alláhábád, and the Bundelás, the latter being assisted by the Kols, with whom Dhánuks, Kanjars, and Kanjers are said to have been associated.

The foregoing details show the gradual manner in which the aboriginal* tribes have been supplanted.

The interesting question as to the nature of the religion of the Bhars was raised by Mr. Sherring,† and has since been discussed by Mr. Carnegy. The former gentleman came to the conclusion that the Bhars were Buddhists; and the latter arrived at the somewhat ambiguous result that the “god-neglecting, caste-disregarding race” which formerly held Eastern Audh were the Bhars.‡ Mr. Sherring’s arguments and the plates of Bhar sculptures, published in illustration of his essay, seem to me to prove that the religion of the Eastern Bhars was Jain rather than Buddhist, and the facts which I shall now mention are I think sufficient to raise a presumption that the Bhars and other aborigines of Bundelkhand during a period of at least two or three centuries professed Jainism, though perhaps not exclusively. It may well be that in earlier times they were Buddhists, for the close relation between the Jain and the Buddhist faith and the high antiquity of the former are only now beginning to be perceived.

A tradition is current at Mahobá that many years subsequent to the conquest of that city in the reign of Shiháb-uddín§ (1202-3 A. D.), Ajaipál and Bhar and others, seven brothers who were Jains and Jogís and great magicians, became rulers of the country: Ajaipál conquered Ajmír, but Bhar held Mahobá, and so oppressed the Musalmáns that they invoked the aid of Malik Sháh who came from the west, and after a bloody contest slew Rájá Bhar and his fourteen sons, whose wives then burned themselves without the aid of fire, the place where they sacrificed themselves being pointed out to this day as the *Chaudah Rání kí satí*, i. e., the burning-place of the fourteen queens.

Mauza’ Bharwára in pargana Panwári-Jaitpur is said, according to the local tradition, to have been founded by Rájá Bhar of Mahobá|| and to have been occupied by Lodhís in 1300 Samvat (= 1243 A. D.): as illus-

* I use the word ‘aboriginal’ as a convenient term, but as I have hinted above some of the so-called aborigines may themselves have moved from their original seat.

† In the essay already quoted, p. 228.

‡ J. A. S. B., XLV, Pt. I, 299.

§ Mr. Blochmann, in J. A. S. B., XLIV, Pt. I, p. 277, proves the correct date of the conquest.

|| A tradition is quoted in N. W. P. Gaz. I, pp. 406-7, to the effect that a temple at Dadhwá Manpur Garrampur in pargana Badausá of the Banda District was the treasury of the Bhar Rájás of Kálinjar, whose descendants continued to use it until a recent date: this is the only reference I know to Bhar Rájás of Kálinjar.

trating the supposed connection between the Bhars and Jainism, it is noticeable that at Dinaí about a mile from Bharwára there is a colossal Jain image of Setnáth with an inscription dated 1196 Samvat (= 1139 A. D.), and the ruins of a highly ornamented temple are a conspicuous object on an adjoining hill top. In other localities I have found at and near Bhar sites small Jain sculptures which it would be tedious to specify. The earliest known Jain inscription in Bundelkhand, (supposing its date to be correctly read, which is doubtful*) is one at Khajuráho, dated 1011 Samvat = 954 A. D., in the reign of King Dhanga: the other Jain inscriptions from Khajuráho and Mahobá, enumerated by General Cunningham (Arch. Rep. II, 448), range from 1142 to 1234 Samvat, *i. e.*, 1085 to 1177 A. D.: eight additional dated Jain inscriptions, which I know of in various places in the Hamírpur District, range from 1196 to 1232 Samvat = 1139 to 1175 A. D. At Khajuráho all the important temples, whether Vaishnava, Saiva, or Jain, seem to have been erected in the eleventh century A. D.†: we may therefore safely affirm that Jainism flourished in Bundelkhand during the eleventh and twelfth centuries A. D. side by side with other forms of religion, and we have already seen that during the same period much of the country was occupied by the Bhars and other aboriginal tribes.

I have already mentioned that Mr. Sherring's arguments to my mind proved the eastern Bhars too to be Jains; chance enables me to offer a fact in confirmation of this theory.

I lately obtained from Banda a collection of hymns to the twenty-four deities of the Digambar Jains as there recited at a Jain shrine: the first hymn is addressed to Ádináth, and its opening lines which I quote‡ below, show that the ruined Bhar stronghold Pampápur near Mirzápur, the locality described in detail by Mr. Sherring, is still a sacred place of the Jains.

A Bhát supplied my paṇḍit with lists, as complete as he could remember, of the Bhar and Gond§ tribal deities; the following he named as the Bhar gods:—

* Cunningham, Arch. Rep. II, p. 433, and J. A. S. B., XXIX, 396.

† Fergusson, Ind. Archit., p. 245.

‡ आदिनाथ परमेस्वरस्वामी ऋषभदेव मनभायेजी ।
वाहन सांडु जनेवर काजै पंपापुर को आयेजी ॥
गलियन २ फिरत जात्री हूँढत आदि मुनीसुरजी ।
पंपापुर संभू भवन में ठाकुर आये बिराजेजी ॥

§ The Gond deities he remembered were: (1) Narhar, (this is mentioned by Chand as the name of a Gond champion): (2) Nagesur: (3) Jhakajhok: (4) Gunraiya: (5) Karuwá.

(1) Sattí-Sattá : (2) Mundá Deo : (3) Bhainsesur : (4) Ratásá or Raktásá : (5) Bharráha Járí : (6) Jhapaṭá : (7) Marahí : (8) Bharáyanr.

The worship of these minor deities may of course have been practised by persons professing Jainism, in the same way as worship is now offered to scores of obscure local gods and demons, by persons professing various forms of Hinduism. It is possible that the Bhainsá Darwáza, one of the gates of the town of Mahobá, may be named after Bhainsesur.

Antiquarian visitors to Mahobá are familiar with the temple of Maniyá Deo, the tutelary deity of the Chandel Rájás ; it is curious that the only other shrine in the Hamírpur District, so far as I know, dedicated to this divinity is found at a village named Barel in pargana Ráṭh, where there are indications near the modern village, which is occupied by a Lodhí population, of the former existence of a town or large village which has long since disappeared. This locality seems to be the Bharel* named by the above quoted Bháṭ as one of the Bhar villages, and some sculptures exist in the village such as are found at Bhar sites. It becomes, therefore, possible that Maniyá Deo was a Bhar goddess, and, if this be the fact, the circumstance throws some light on the origin of the Chandel race, which is admittedly impure. I had not an opportunity of seeing the object of worship at Barel, but the cherished image at Mahobá, which I have seen, is simply a shapeless block of stone daubed with red, and evidently represents none of the Hindú gods, whereas it is exactly such an object as we might expect to be the fetish of a tribe of hill men. There is not, so far as I am aware, any tradition of a close connection between the Chandels and the Bhars,† but with the Gonds the Chandels are known to have maintained constant intercourse, sometimes friendly, and sometimes hostile. Chand tells us that the Chandel Rájá Kírat Singh hunted at Maniyá Gaṛh with Singh the Gond chieftain of Gaṛha Mandlá on the Narbadá, and that afterwards when war broke out, Kírat Singh was taken prisoner by the Gonds, an injury which was revenged by Alhá in the reign of Parmál. The name of the Gond hunting ground Maniyá Gaṛh inevitably suggests that Maniyá Deo may be a Gond as well as a Bhar deity, and, if this supposition be correct, an additional proof is obtained that there was little difference between Bhar and Gond. In the hills of the Kaimúr Range in Ríwá, east of Bundelkhand, the Bhars, Suriyás, Cherús, Binds, and Kharwárs may still be

* The loss of the initial aspirate in local names is very common ; thus in the Hamírpur District, Bilrakh and Bilahanrí were formerly Bhíl villages, and in Audh (J. A. S. B., XLV, Pt. I, p. 300) Badoí, Barrosá, Baráich, and Bareli derive their names from the Bhars : and many similar examples might be given.

† Oldham, 'Stat. Memoir of Ghazipur' (I, 48), states that Chandel Rájputés murdered the Bhar Rájá and founded the principalities of Bijaigaṛh, Bardhí, and Barhar in the Ríwá territories.

found intermingled, and “intermarriage between the daughters of the Kharwár chief and a Chandel Rájput prince is mentioned in the annals of Bundelkhand.”* In Lalatpur, too, the connection between the Gonds and Chandels seems to be remembered,† and the story of the marriage of Durgávatí of the Chandel line with the Rájá of Garha Mandlá‡ shows that the connection subsisted so late as the sixteenth century A. D.; there is therefore nothing improbable in supposing that the myth of the union of Hemávatí with the moon as related in the Chandel legends was invented to conceal the fact that the Chandels really sprang from an aboriginal stock; whether this stock was called Bhar or Gond we cannot say, and, if I am right in thinking the two tribes to be very closely connected, the question is of no importance. The construction of the great Vijayanagar or Bijánagar lake near Mahobá is attributed to the Gaharwárs, who are said to have preceded the Chandels in that part of the country, and I think it is not unlikely that the Chandel clan is the result of crossing Gaharwár with Bhar or Gond blood: the popular legends indeed assert the fact of relationship between the Gaharwárs§ of Benares and the Chandels.

The Bhars of Bundelkhand, so far as we know them, seem to have possessed little of the arts of civilization, and to have consequently left behind them almost nothing of architectural or artistic interest. In the eastern districts the Bhars are credited with the construction of many tanks and massive forts, but in Hamírpur I have not met with a single fort or tank the construction of which is ascribed to them; everything old is indiscriminately called Chandel, and is usually placed to the credit of Rájá Parmál or his famous champions Alhá and Udal: it is, however, probable that some of the works attributed to the Chandels were executed by other races. The commonest objects of antiquity in the district are rude bas-reliefs of Hanumán, here usually called Mahábír, and there is scarcely one of the numerous sites of ancient abandoned villages, whether Bhar or otherwise, which is not marked by an image of the monkey-god.

Upright slabs or pillars of granite bearing on one face a pair of rudely carved figures in relief, are met with in many places. The design consists of two standing figures, one male, and the other female, holding each other by the hand: at the top left hand corner of the stone there is a detached

* Chandra Sekhara Banurjí, in J. A. S. B., Vol. XLVI, Pt. I, p. 25. I do not know what annals are referred to.

† N. W. P. Gazetteer, Vol. I, p. 351; but the statement there may be based only on Sleeman's narrative.

‡ Sleeman's History of the Garha Mandlá Rájás in J. A. S. B. for 1837, Vol. VI, (2), pp. 621-648.

§ *Vide* Cunningham, Arch. Rep. II, 'Mahobá' and Beames' Elliot, s. v. Bhar, Chandel, Gaharwár.

open hand, and in the corresponding right hand corner a crescent moon and a circle representing the sun.

These sculptures appear to be *satí* monuments: they are very common in Pargana Jaitpur and are there sometimes spoken of as ‘*Satí-Satá*’. Jaitpur was occupied by Gonds, who were expelled by the Bundelás and Marathas. At an ancient village in pargana Ráth I found two of these stones, and close by, a *satí* pillar of the ordinary type* bearing only the emblems of a female hand and arm with the sun and moon, but without human figures. Stones sculptured with the sun and moon emblems, unaccompanied by either figures or hand, are often met with.

Rude effigies of single warriors, armed with a bow, or with a round target and a short straight-pointed sword, are also common.

I append a rough sketch or diagram (Pl. XIV) of a curious slab standing in the village of Tika Mau near Mahobá: the village is an ancient one, and is mentioned by Chand as belonging to Desráj, father of Alhá and Udal, and according to tradition was formerly occupied by Kurnís: the design resembles in general outline that of the “*satí-satá*” sculptures above described, but differs in that the male and female figures are not holding hands and have heads resembling respectively a monkey and a bird, and that the detached hand is placed between the sun and moon.

On the surface of the mound marking the site of a Bhar village at Barenrá in Jalálpur, my paṇḍit picked up the two curious objects figured at the bottom of Plate XIV. They look like seals or amulets, and the material seems to be the coarse soap stone found in the district: I cannot even guess the meaning of the characters engraved on them, but the open hand on the larger one is exactly similar to that carved on the stone monuments. As is the case at many ancient sites in the district, bricks of great size are found at Barenrá.

The Bhar site named Bhareswar near Rauro in pargana Ráth is remarkable for an irregular circle formed of twelve large upright stones, close to which two other stones are lying prostrate: one of the slabs here is carved with five small detached rings, called *nakat-gol* by the people, which remind me of the “cup markings” in Kamáon, described by Mr. Carnac†: coins are said to have been found at this spot, but as usual I could get no definite information about them.

I have often seen at old sites slabs engraved with sets of concentric rings a foot or more in diameter, which most probably symbolize Mahádeo, as conjectured by Mr. Carnac with reference to the similar sculptures in Kamáon, or may perhaps be images of the sun as the villagers say.

* Cunningham, Arch. Report III, p. x.

† J. A. S. B., XLVI, Pt. I, p. 1 seqq.

Further local enquiries, or a happy accident, may put me in possession of additional information about the Bhars of Bundelkhand, but at present the foregoing notes embody all that I can ascertain on the subject.

EXPLANATORY NOTE.

The preceding essay was written to illustrate a bronze plate inscription which purported to record a victory of the Lodhís over the Bhars of Parganas Ráth and Jalálpur in the year 1404 Samvat, and was read before the Society* in its original form.

Sir E. C. Bayley and Dr. Rájendralála Mitra are of opinion that the inscription described by me is not genuinc, and their opinion is based on arguments which I readily admit to be conelusive: the forgery was a clever one, but not suffieiently clever to deceive competent scholars.

I have therefore cut out from my paper all references to the inscription, and much other matter which rested on the authority of the paṇḍit, who beyond doubt contrived the forgery.

All information derived from a tainted source is of course open to suspicion, and therefore I must specify the assertions still remaining in the text of my paper which rest on information supplied by the incriminated paṇḍit.

The tribal records of the Bágri and Mauhár Thákurs were furnished by him in copies: the originals he said he had met with while employed on a tour of investigation under the orders of the Settlement Officer at Banda: there seems to be no particular reason why these documents should have been fabricated.

The Jain hymns, one of which I quote, were also brought to me by the paṇḍit, who professed to have taken them down from the dictation of a person who takes care of a Jain shrine at Banda; they are of little interest and not likely to be inventions.

The lists of Bhar and Gonḍ deities, the name of Bharel as a Bhar village, and the names of Bilrakh and Bilahanrí as Bhíl villages, rest on the authority of a Bhát as reported by the paṇḍit, and I have no special reason to suppose these particulars to be untrue.

The scals or amulets, whichever they are, were brought in by him, and seem genuinc; but I have not visited Barenrá myself.

After the excisions it has undergone, my essay, I fear, presents a very disjointed appearance, and retains little of value or of interest.

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* *Vide* Proceedings, As. Socy. Bengal, for December, 1877.